

**Hold Fast
We Are In Christ
Selected Scriptures
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As I thought this week about our study today, I was reminded of the fact that there are vague similarities between the Christian faith and Satan's worthless imitations. There are points of contact between the worship of the one true God and false religion inspired by and controlled by Satan but it's also important to remember that there are always elements of our faith that are utterly distinct from anything Satan produces. The nature of our God as a Triune God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, His Son becoming incarnate and flesh and living on this planet, the way in which we are made right with God - not through our own works or our own efforts but, rather, through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Those are all utterly unique to Christianity.

There's another concept that is distinct from all pagan religion, from all false religion, that Paul refers to extremely often in his writings. It's a concept that is encapsulated in the little phrase that is almost ubiquitous in the New Testament - "in Christ." This idea is unique to Christianity. Buddhists don't talk about being in Buddha. Followers of Confucius don't say that they are in Confucius. Muslims never speak of being in Allah. But the New Testament teaches that, as Christians, we are in Christ. Sadly, I think most Christians don't know what that means, and they have absolutely no idea of how utterly important it is.

In fact, this little phrase "in Christ" is at the very heart of the Christian faith. A.W. Pink writes, "the subject of spiritual union (that is, our spiritual union with Christ) is the most important (listen to that), the most profound, and the most blessed of any that is set forth in the sacred scriptures; and yet, sad to say, there is hardly any which is now more generally neglected." John Murray writes, "union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." In other words, if you don't understand this, you don't really understand the salvation you enjoy. Sinclair Ferguson in his really helpful little book called *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* writes of union with Christ, "it is a doctrine which lies at the heart of the Christian life."

Union with Christ is the foundation of all our spiritual experience and all spiritual blessings. Now, why are these writers so captivated, so carried away with the importance of this truth? It's because of the importance that scripture itself gives to it. Paul uses phrases like "in Christ" or "in Him" or "in Whom" 164 times in his letters - 36 times in Ephesians alone, 11 times in the first paragraph in Ephesians. This little but absolutely crucial phrase, introduces us to the biblical doctrine of union with Christ. It's a truth that, I suspect, you have never heard a sermon about unless you were here when we were going through Ephesians in the early days of our study of that letter. It is a central truth to the Christian faith that today's church has largely forgotten and that's why it fits well into our summer series "Hold Fast: The Forgotten Truths We Must Always Remember."

I want us to look at it this morning. And again, remember it is at the heart of our faith. There is nothing more important to your spiritual life and growth than understanding and applying this truth. So, I want to consider this morning two aspects of our union with Christ.

Let's start with the meaning of the phrase itself. Now, in following one of my mentors Martyn Lloyd-Jones, before we define its meaning, I want to first understand what it does not mean because there's a lot of confusion about what it means to be in Christ. First of all, it does not refer to the natural, non-saving union of all life to the life of God. In Acts 17, as Paul's speaking on Mars Hill, verse 27 he says God, "is not far from each one of us." Remember now, he's talking to unbelievers and he says, "for in Him we live and move and exist." That's true of all life. The only reason anybody on this planet, any life, is sustained is because of its connection to the life of God. That's not what Paul means when he says we are, "in Christ." Secondly, union with Christ does not mean that the believer comes to possess all of Christ's attributes - including the divine. This is a heresy taught by some of the Word of Faith preachers in the charismatic movement. You'll hear them talk about our becoming like God in the sense of sharing His unique attributes - like Kenneth Copeland's famous statement or, I should say, infamous statement, you don't have a God in you, you are one. That's heresy and that's not what being in Christ has anything to do with. Thirdly, being in Christ is not the same as being in the church. This is an error that the Roman Catholic church teaches that that union with Christ comes from your connection with the mother church and that union is transmitted to you through the sacraments - particularly, in

Roman Catholic theology, through the Eucharist. That's not what Paul is talking about. And fourthly, being in Christ, is not a mystical, experiential thing. It's not an experience to be sought. It's not like is taught in the Keswick movement or the Deeper Life movement. I became exposed to this early in my Christian life and if you come across the writings of Watchman Nee or Witness Lee, don't walk, run. They'll be terribly damaging to your Christian faith. But what that movement teaches is that, in a sense, you stop living. It's like you just sort of fade into the background and you become like an automaton, a robot, and Christ, instead, lives in your body and He lives your life. That's not what Paul is talking about either.

So, what does being in Christ mean? Well, our Lord first exposed us to this truth. Turn to John chapter 5. Let me just show you several times that our Lord mentions this. I'm sorry, John 6:56, "he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him," By the way, the context here has nothing to do with the Lord's table, has nothing to do with the Eucharist. In fact, talking about this is an illustration of believing. Go back to verse 47, "truly. I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life," and then He talks about by eating and drinking His blood you gain eternal life in verses 53-55. So understand, then, what He's talking about here is a true believer, that is, one who comes to believe in Him and that belief is described as partaking of Christ, He says of that person, verse 56: I abide in him and he abides in Me. Turn over to John 14:20, "on that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you are in Me, and I am in you." John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him that person will bear much fruit." And then, in John 17:21 He says, "Father you are in Me and I in you. I want that they also may be in Us, so the world may believe that You sent me." So, you get this relationship between us and Christ that is like that between Him and the Father. We are in Him.

Now, what does that mean? Well, let me briefly consider several questions with you.

First of all, what's a theological definition of this union with Christ? Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology defines it this way, "it is that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength and of their

blessedness and salvation. It is a connection with Christ that becomes the source of everything we need for our spiritual lives and growth.”

Now, if you don't understand all of that, stay with me. I'm going to explain, that in more detail as we go along.

Another question that needs to be asked is: why are we in Him? How did this happen? Why are we in Christ? According to 1 Corinthians 1:30, it is initiated by a sovereign act of God. Paul has just been talking about our calling we talked about it last week, the effectual call. God called us, through the gospel, to Himself and He connects with that, in 1 Corinthians 1:30, our being in Christ. And he says this: by God's doing you are in Christ Jesus. It's something God did. It's in conjunction with the effectual call. When He called you to Himself, when He regenerated you, in conjunction with that, He, by His own will, put you in Christ.

But how exactly was it accomplished is another question that comes to mind - and the answer may surprise you. It was by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now, if you grew up in a Pentecostal or Charismatic church, you heard them refer to the baptism of the Spirit as the sort of special gifting of a select few. It only happens to the spiritual elite and it's connected to speaking in tongues or the miraculous gifts. That's a tragic error because scripture actually teaches us that every Christian has already experienced the baptism of the Spirit.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 as Paul sets the stage for dealing with the abuse of the gift of tongues in chapter 14, he lays a sort of theological foundation for our spiritual gifts here in chapter 12 and in the context of that, he says something remarkable in verse 13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Now, what he says here. We have all experienced Spirit baptism. By the work of the Spirit, “we,” he means all genuine believers, “we,” speaking of himself and the Corinthian believers - all without exception, all believers - this is true of. And notice he uses the past tense, “we were all baptized by the Spirit into one body.” This is something that has already happened. It happened at the moment of salvation. That's why we're never told in scripture to seek the baptism of the Spirit because it's already a reality. We were all baptized by the Spirit into one body. We're never told to seek it because it's simply true already.

Now, what is this one body? Turn over to Galatians 3 and Paul further explains - Galatians 3:27. He says, "all of you who were baptized into Christ," and we just learned that Spirit baptism happens to all believers at the moment of salvation. Notice, here he doesn't say, though, we were baptized into one body, He says we were baptized, what? Into Christ. So, he was talking about Christ's body back in 1 Corinthians 12:13. But don't miss the larger point that he's making here. It is by the work of the Spirit, through a work called baptism - and that's not water baptism, that's the word baptize simply means "to immerse." When the Spirit, at the moment of salvation, immersed you into Christ, you were placed in Christ. If you're a Christian, you are in Christ. Sinclair Ferguson rights, speaking of our union with Christ, "these are not benefits to which faith works up, but blessings which are bestowed upon us the moment we belong to Christ. If we are Christians, all of this is true of all of us all of the time." You were baptized into Christ at the moment of salvation, you were inseparably united to Jesus Christ. That's what the phrase means and that's how it was accomplished.

But there's a second aspect of this doctrine I want to spend the rest of our time on this morning. And that is: the nature of this union. What exactly does this mean? In everyday terms, what is the nature of this union we experience with Christ? Well, we can get only a little help from the Greek here. Most of the time when it occurs, it occurs with the Greek preposition that scholars agree simply is used of location. We have been incorporated into Christ or, you could think of it this way: if you're a Christian you reside in Christ. But that doesn't help us a lot. That doesn't help me a lot. I still want us to see if we can get our arms around more of what it means to be united to Christ. When you examine the biblical data, and we're going to do that together in the next few minutes, scripture defines the nature of our union with Christ as consisting of four great benefits and, if you understand these benefits, you understand what it means to be in Christ. So, let's look at them together.

To be in Christ means we enjoy, first of all, the benefit of His continual presence.

Now, you understand that, if you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit indwells you. The New Testament teaches that again and again. And that's how we normally think of the presence of

God in our lives, but the New Testament also teaches that we enjoy the abiding presence of our Lord Himself. Now this shouldn't surprise us because when the angel came and announced, even to Joseph, the birth of Jesus, he says He can be described as Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now, when we hear that expression, we think, “well, yeah, but that's the Incarnation. He's with us in the sense that He became one of us and He lived here for 33 years and that's true, but it's more than that. He's always God with us. He's always the Mediator between God and man. He's with us in an ongoing way. In John 14:20 we read a moment ago, He says, “I am in you.” 1 Corinthians 6:15, Paul says, “do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ.” And then he applies it very practically says, “shall I take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?” He said: really? Christ is in you. you're going to go take Christ along and do that? May it never be. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul urges us to test ourselves to see if we're in the faith. He says, “examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Christ is in you - unless you fail the test.” In other words, if you're really a Christian, if you pass the examination, then Christ is in you. Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.” Colossians 1:27, “God willed to make known the riches of the glory of a mystery among the Gentiles.” What's the mystery? Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christian, do you realize - not only does the Holy Spirit indwell you, you have the continual abiding presence of Jesus Himself? By the way, if we had time, I would show you it's also true of the Father. You enjoy the constant presence of the Triune God.

The abiding presence of Our Lord with us and in us is part of what it means to be in Christ. Do you understand what this means practically? Have you ever in your life felt alone? You never have been, if you're in Christ, because you have His continual presence. He will always be with you, He promised. In Psalm 23:4, we learn that our Shepherd King - the New Testament, in John 10, makes it clear that's Christ, Our Shepherd King - is with us, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil.” Why? “For you are with me.” And our Lord, in the Great Commission, made this promise. I was reminded of this as I was praying this morning for the service. He says, you carry out that commission - and we're doing that this morning. I am teaching you to observe all things that He commanded us - and He says, as you do that, “I am

with you always, even to the end of the age.” Since Jesus is with you, you enjoy His continual abiding presence. That's part of what it means to be in Christ.

But that's not all it means. Secondly, to be in Christ means that we enjoy the benefit of a special, unique, intimate relationship. He's not just near us, He has a relationship with us. In fact, this relationship is so unique and so remarkable that the New Testament uses the metaphor of marriage or the relationship between a husband and his bride to describe our relationship to Jesus Christ. Christ as the husband; believers as His bride. 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul says, “I betrothed you to one husband,” Corinthian believers, “so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” Revelation 21:9, one of the seven angels spoke to John and said, “come here, I'll show you the bride the wife of the Lamb.” And, of course, in Ephesians 5, that classic passage, Paul uses our union with Christ to picture the marriage union and vice versa. In fact, turn to Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Notice, he immediately transitions from human marriage to describing our relationship to Christ. Christ “loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory.” Here's that image of a bride, “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” And then he goes right back into the human relationship of marriage.

Now, why does he do that? Please understand that our union with Christ is not just like human marriage in every way – even the best of human marriages. It's not that there's a point-for-point resemblance between our marriages and our relationship to Christ. Instead, the point Paul is making is that God created human marriage, in part, to illustrate the special relationship between us and Christ - in the right kind of godly marriage, think about what exists. There is a mutual, a love - one for the other. That's true in our relationship with Christ. There is devotion. There is commitment - lifelong commitment. As in marriage, our relationship to Christ is superior to all other relationships. As in a good marriage, Christ loves us and even far beyond any earthly marriage, Christ loves us. He sacrificed Himself for us and our needs. He loves us with a sanctifying love. He nourishes us. That means He provides for us. He takes care of us. He

cherishes us. That means He loves us with a tender, affectionate love. He is committed to us forever - not just 'til death do us part. 'Til nothing do us part. We are glued to Christ.

And we, in turn, like the wife in a marriage, we love Him in response, and we submit our wills to Him. Marriage becomes a beautiful picture of our relationship to Christ and the fact that God uses marriage - the closest of human relationships - to picture our union with Christ points out the uniqueness, the closeness of the special relationship. So, our union with Christ brings us the benefit of a special, unique, intimate relationship that is above all other relationships, that can only be compared to the human level to the best of human marriages.

A third benefit we enjoy that helps us understand the nature of our union with Christ is a relationship with Christ in which He is our personal representative. This is really absolutely foundational to understanding our union with Christ and to understanding how God sees us. By an act of divine reckoning, God permanently considers Christ to stand in your place to be your representative. That is one sense in which you are in Christ. He is your representative. Whatever Christ is, God sees you as. Whatever Christ does, God sees you as having done.

Now, the closest example that we can get to this in a human level is here, in our country, representative government. We select, we choose representatives. Well, we kind of choose them. We don't always get to choose the ones we want but we do choose them and then we reap the benefits of their good and wise decisions, when they make them, and we suffer the consequences of their poor decisions. They act as our representatives with the rest of the world. The same is true in the spiritual dimension except we didn't choose our representatives spiritually, God chose them.

Who was the first representative God chose for every one of us? Adam. We were, as Paul describes in Romans 5, "in Adam." That was your union before Christ. You were united to Adam. He was your representative. He stood in your place. He made the decisions for you and you reap the consequences of his decision. You were considered guilty because of Adam's choice. You receive the moral pollution that passed down through Adam's descendants. You suffer because of what Adam did. Oh, and by the way, we would've done the same thing. Don't

be too hard on Adam. You said, well, how do you know I would have done the same thing? Because you do it every day. And so do I. You choose to rebel against God. That's what Adam did and so, he served as our representative. God chose Adam to be that. 1 Corinthians 15:22, "in Adam all die."

But for those on whom God set his eternal love, God gave us a new representative. He gave us Christ. Christ is a perfect representative. 1 Corinthians 15:22 goes on to say, "in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." You know, Christ became your representative, began to represent you in eternity past? As we studied last week in Ephesians 1:4, Paul says God, "chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world." John Murray writes, "those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of His predestinating love apart from union with Christ—they were chosen in Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation to its fountain, we find 'union with Christ'; it is not something tacked on; it is there from the outset." In the mind of God, you have been connected to Christ as your representative from eternity past.

And, of course, that intensified when Christ became one of us and lived here on Earth among us. Throughout the earthly life of Christ, God considered Him to be the perfect representative of us in the same way that Adam was a terrible representative for us. So, all that Christ did while he was on Earth, God counted it as if you did it.

Let's take the death of Christ. You get credit for His death. In Ephesians 1:7 Paul writes, "in Him we have redemption through His blood" - that is, through His death – "the forgiveness of our trespasses." It was through our union with Christ that our sin could be justly credited to Him and God could judge Him for our sins on the cross.

It was also because of our union with Christ that we can receive His righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God." How? In Him.

Just as we are united with Him in His death, we are also united with Him in His burial and His resurrection. Turnover to Romans 6. In our study of Romans, someday we will get to this passage. Romans 6:3, “Do you not know” - don't you get it? – “all of us who have been baptized” - immersed into Christ Jesus – “have been immersed into His death.” You're connected with Him in His death. “Therefore, we've also been buried with Him through baptism into death.” By the way, there's no water in this passage. Baptism pictures the spiritual reality, but he's talking about spiritual realities. You were united with Christ when Christ was on the earth. When He died, you died. When He was buried, you were buried with Him. This is how God thinks of it because He was your representative.

And notice, verse 5, “for if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Our old self was crucified with Him. And Verse 11, “consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do you understand that because Christ was your representative, when Christ died, in the mind of God, you died with Him? The old person that you were paid the penalty that you deserve to pay. You died, you suffered, with Christ, the wrath of God on the cross because He was your representative. When he was buried, raised from the dead, you were raised to new life. What baptism does picture? What our baptism pictures - our being united with Christ. We died. We were raised to new life.

We've even been enthroned with Him in heaven. You ascended with Christ and were seated with Him on the throne of God because He's your representative. Ephesians 2:6 says the Father seated us with Christ in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. You see, you were united with Christ as He accomplished the work of redemption 2,000 years ago. He was your representative and because of that, God sees you as having lived His perfect life of obedience.

How can God credit you with the righteousness of Christ? It's because He was your representative, and so, you were in Him. God sees you as having endured and satisfied His just wrath against your sin because Christ did as your representative on the cross. I love Romans 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those,” – what? – “who are in Christ Jesus.” Because Christ was raised to new life, the Father sees you as having been raised to new life. His

punishment is your punishment. His resurrection, your resurrection. His righteousness, your righteousness. And when Christ left this earth, He had earned all of those blessings of salvation for you. He had been your representative, but they still have to be personally applied. Until you came to faith in Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 2, you were dead in transgressions and sins. You are a child of wrath. You were separate from Christ. You're without hope, without God in the world. And so, it was only through God's calling you to Himself, regenerating your heart, that you became a beneficiary really and personally of Christ as your representative.

That's when it was applied to you. By His doing you are in Christ Jesus. You were united to Him as your representative. Think about this, Christian, God never ever sees you apart from your representative. And so, He sees you as having done exactly what Christ did and as being exactly what Christ is at a human level.

Now there's another benefit that describes our union with Christ and that is what we could call a vital connection. That is, a life-giving connection. Scripture pictures this for us in several ways. Let me just give you the images. I won't take the time to turn there, but just to remind you of them.

First of all, scripture describes our connection to Christ as that of a cornerstone or foundation and the stones that are built on that foundation - Christ being the foundation, us being the building or the stones, Ephesians 2, 1 Peter 2. The picture here is that Christ is the source of our stability just as a cornerstone in a foundation is the source of a building's stability. He provides the strength for our lives, the stability for our lives, the foundation of our Christian lives.

Secondly, there's the image of Christ as a vine or, we could say, the trunk of a vine and believers as the branches. In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit for apart from Me, you can do nothing." You know what Christ is saying? Our spiritual life is sustained by our connection to Christ. Our spiritual growth, our spiritual fruit, flows to us from Christ. It is a vital connection.

A third image the scripture uses of Christ as the head and us as the body. You get this image. It's in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 4. Just as your head gives directions and orders to your body, Christ is connected to us in the same way. Sever the head and the body loses its capacity to function, its very life.

Now, there's a danger with these illustrations and that is for you to choose one of them and make that explain the entirety of our relationship to Christ. It's only together that they round out our understanding. The point is: this union to Christ, this connection to Christ, is not an experience to be sought. It is a reality to be understood. If you're a Christian, you are spiritually united to Christ in these ways.

Robert Raymond, speaking of this vital connection to Christ where we get our life from Him, our spiritual strength, writes this, I love this, "scriptures make it clear that, though it is spiritual, this non-material union with Christ is as real as though there were, in fact, a literal umbilical cord uniting them - reaching all the way from Christ in Heaven to the believer on Earth." That's a perfect picture just like that umbilical cord in the womb of a mother brings her life and sustains the life of that child, everything that child needs comes to that child through the umbilical cord. In the same way, we are united to Christ, really, spiritually, and His life is what sustains our spiritual lives. The reason you still believe, the reason you grow, the reason there's any spiritual fruit in your life whatsoever is because of Jesus Christ. "Apart from Me," He says, "you can do nothing," spiritually speaking.

Now, because of that vital connection, that life-giving connection, being in Christ comes with a host of rich spiritual benefits. In fact, it includes all the aspects of our redemption. It's only because you're united to Christ that the work of Christ can be applied to you. According to Ephesians 1:3, every spiritual blessing you enjoy is in Christ. Your spiritual life is sustained, it's strengthened, through your connection to Christ.

Now. I don't have time to develop them but let me just give you a short list of the blessings that are yours because you are in Christ. This is what the scriptures teach.

First of all, grace - 1 Corinthians 1:4 - grace is given to us in Christ. Regeneration - Ephesians 2:10 - we were created in Christ Jesus. Justification - 2 Corinthians 5:21 - we received the righteousness of God in Him. Pardon and Forgiveness - Ephesians 1:7 - in Him, we have redemption and forgiveness. Sanctification - 1 Corinthians 1:30 - you are in Christ who became to us sanctification. Eternal life - 2 Timothy 1:1 - eternal life is in Christ. The fact that you will never be separated from God's love - Romans 8:39 - nothing is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ. Unity with other Christians - Galatians 3:28 - we are one body in Christ. The security of God's promises to you - 2 Corinthians 1:19 - His promises are "yes" in Christ. Grace to live the Christian Life - 2 Timothy 2:1 - be strong in the grace that is in Christ. When you die, you die in Christ and you are still in Christ even though your body is in the grave - 1 Thessalonians 4:14 - we hear of the dead in Christ. Those who have gone before you, died, who are in Christ - listen, they are still in Christ. We will be resurrected in Christ - 1 Corinthians 15:22 - in Christ shall all be made alive. We will be glorified in Christ - Romans 8:17 - we will be glorified with Him.

Folks, what could be more practical to your Christian life than your union to Jesus Christ? It encompasses everything from election in eternity past to glorification in eternity future and everything in between. Why? Because God never thinks of you apart from your union to Jesus Christ and He will never treat you differently, therefore, than He would treat Jesus Christ.

There's an old illustration of this truth. You put a piece of paper into a book and close the book. However you treat the book is how you treat the piece of paper. If you treasure the book, you treasure the piece of paper and when you look, you don't see the paper, you see the book. That's how it is with our relationship to Jesus Christ. When God looks on us, He sees us as in Christ and He treats us as if we were Christ Himself.

Now, the practical use of our union with Christ is immense. Let me just give you a couple of thoughts in application. Understanding our union with Christ, first of all, provides security in the gospel. So many people struggle with assurance of their faith. Even though they have repented of their sins, they put their faith in Jesus Christ, they're pursuing holiness, they're trying to walk in obedience, they still struggle with doubts and assurance. Listen, do you understand what Paul

says in Ephesians 2 that you are seated with Christ in heaven? It's certain. It's secure. Michael Barrett writes, "one of the greatest advantages that union with Christ provides us is the profound sense of assurance and security flowing from the knowledge that God deals with us only and always in terms of Christ." Will God ever successfully allow Christ to be accused and condemned? Of course not. Then He will never allow those who are in Christ to be accused successfully or condemned because you are in Christ.

Secondly, our union with Christ encourages and promotes our sanctification. This doesn't cause you to say: well, I mean, Christ I can live however, I want. No, not at all. The absolute opposite is true. Here's how John puts it in 1 John 2: 5-6, "By this we know that we are in Him." How do you know if you're really in Christ? The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same way as Jesus walked here. In Christ, you know what, you want to be like Him. You want to live like He lived. You want to think like He thought. You want to honor God like He honored God.

There's a great illustration. I mentioned earlier, in 1 Corinthians 6:15, where Paul applies the reality of our union with Christ to the issue of sexual sin - very appropriate in our day. Paul says: listen, really? You want to take Christ who is ever with you, who is united with you, who is in you - you want to take Him and do that? You want to sit in front of that computer screen and watch things you shouldn't watch when you are in Christ when He is with you? It encourages and promotes our sanctification.

Thirdly, our union with Christ is crucial - and this is related but slightly different - in overcoming the power of sin in a daily way in our lives. Back to John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit." What kind of fruit's he talking about there? Well, He's using an agricultural metaphor and we know one basic law of fruit in agriculture is that each bears fruit after its own kind. He's talking here about likeness to Christ. The branches bear the same fruit as the vine. So, in other words, when you're connected to Jesus Christ, His energy, His strength, His grace, flows to you in the daily battle with sin so that you can every day be putting sin to death and be putting on Jesus Christ. And, if you understand that, it revolutionizes your approach to the daily struggle with sin. Jesus Himself, in that metaphor and

in that context in verse 5 of John 15, says, “and apart from Me, you can do,” what? Nothing. What’s he talking about? Bearing fruit. Being like Him. You can't move one step closer to being like Jesus Christ apart from His energy, His work, His power. It's because you're in Him that those things are available to you.

A fourth fruit of this in our lives: understanding our union with Christ fills us with praise. This is where Paul goes to at the beginning of Ephesians. Ephesians 1:3, he says, “blessed be God,” praise to God, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Why? Because He, “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” When you really understand what is yours - because of your union with Jesus Christ, because of His continual presence, because of your vital connection, because of that special relationship, because of the reality of His power in your life, because He is your representative - when you get that, when you understand that, it fills you with praise because of all that Christ has done and is doing in your life. Beloved, hold fast to the forgotten truth that we are in Christ. Let's pray together.

Father forgive us. Forgive us for neglecting such a crucial, vital part of the Christian faith - the very center of our salvation, of all that you're doing is this reality. And yet, Father, we have failed to understand it. We’ve failed to study it. We’ve failed to live in the light of it. We’ve failed to apply it to our thinking day in and day out about our relationship to You. Father remind us of these truths in the weeks and months ahead. May we never be the same for having come to understand our union with Jesus Christ - that we are in Him. And Father, I pray for those who may be here today who don't get it. We just don't understand, who aren't interested, help them to see that because their eyes are blinded to the truth because they're spiritually dead, unable to respond, and may they come to You putting their faith in Christ and then find that You put them in Christ. We pray this would be the day, in Jesus’ name. Amen.